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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* is devoted to a single study which in many ways is paradigmatic of the work that this publication and its parent Society was designed to encourage and to disseminate. I noted in Volume 1 Number 1 that the Editorial Board was biased toward actual studies that dealt with visual symbolic events in their social and cultural contexts. The Editor's Introduction to that issue of *Studies* also affirmed our desire to provide a place where scholars who worked with large quantities of pictures could present *both* the conclusions they drew from the pictures and the pictures themselves. *Studies* was never meant to be an illustrated journal in the style of the National Geographic. We didn't intend to publish pictures as pretty illustrations for "scientific papers." We did want to provide a place where pictures, as data, could be presented alongside words.

The monograph by Erving Goffman which makes up this issue is to my knowledge the first journal publication presenting some five hundred photographs as part of an analysis of social ceremony. The study not only reproduces the pictures but attempts an extended analysis of how pictures themselves, and pictures of social situations can be used in scientific research. Because this is the first time that a scientific study of social behavior containing so many pictures has appeared in a single journal article, it might be important to frame and to situate (in Goffman's sense) this research within the context of other work analyzing pictures of all kinds for a variety of purposes.

Within social science the work of Bateson and Mead (1942), Gesell (1925), and Gesell and Ilg (1940) come immediately to mind. These studies, however, present a different kind of photograph than will be encountered in the Goffman paper which follows. That is, the earlier studies were based upon photos *taken* by the researchers themselves, in the field, in order to study certain social and biological events. The photographs they used were not a pictorial articulation of a society communicating through pictures, but rather a record of human behavior which these scientists made, and made available for study. In fact, one of the important contributions of that work, particularly of Bateson and Mead, was that not only did the researchers themselves take the photographs in ways that fit their research objectives, but they made the photographs and their analysis of them available to all other researchers. This was the first time that such a large body of photographs, produced and analyzed following the systematic rules of social science, had ever been made available to the entire scientific community *in public*—as a publication. It is

important to note, however, that while Bateson and Mead, and others, were themselves concerned with actually photographing social behavior, the Goffman paper is concerned with a different issue, a different use of photography, and a different method of analysis.

In many ways the issues about pictures that concern Goffman in this monograph—and it is important to point out that issues about pictures are not the only ones he deals with here—revolve around what he calls a "situated social fuss." He is concerned with social situations, with social ceremony, with the affirmation of basic social arrangements. He finds that symbolic events such as weddings, as well as advertisements picturing a wedding, allow us to understand the nature and the presentation of ultimate doctrines about man and the world. It must be noted that not only the advertisements he analyzes, but the fact that a noted social scientist analyzes them, can equally be understood as part of the situated social fuss he is studying.

This kind of study—of social behavior as seen through a symbolic form—has a long tradition in the history of the arts, and although shorter, a lively tradition in such fields as psychoanalysis and social science. The traditions of art history, and of literary criticism, revolve around systems, theories, and examples, of the analysis of individual works and aggregates of works by individual "artists," "schools of artists," "periods," "genres," "styles," and so on. These studies, until very recently, were almost all conducted within a humanistic framework and did not share any of the paradigms of a positivistic scientific framework. Many of them, however, whether primarily evaluative, iconographic, or interpretive in nature can be understood to deal with persons and their place and behavior in society. On that level much of the analysis of symbolic events within a humanistic tradition can be helpful in clarifying what Goffman conceives as the function of ceremony: "the affirmation of basic social arrangements and the presentation of ultimate doctrines about man and the world." These arrangements and these doctrines as presented by the artist were not always clear or easy to understand and contextualize. The function of the iconographer, historian, or critic, in part, was to situate the work or works in question and to point out precisely what as well as how they explicated and presented a "picture" of man at some particular time and place. It was, of course, commonly accepted within these traditions that novels, plays, stories, paintings, and other art forms could be analyzed to show what, as well as how, people in different periods, classes, and cultures believed about themselves and the world they lived in. It was also accepted that although an individual artist could and *did* articulate conventionalized social behavior, postures, and events in his works he did not have to—nor was it even appropriate to—articulate these conventions as rules of social behavior as such. Artists presented society, they were not forced to analyze it as well.

Theories about how to articulate the rules of human and social behavior, and theories about whether most people know, or could know most of the rules that governed their behavior have recently been the center of much interest and controversy. Whether we can articulate "grammar" even though we speak "correctly," whether we know or can know why we "love" even though we are "in love," and whether we can articulate the rules of weddings, eating in restaurants,

or greeting our family and friends are problems that today have become central to our search for an understanding of our own behavior. What is held in common by the art historian, the literary critic, the linguist, and increasingly by other social scientists, is the belief that through the study of how we articulate in a variety of symbolic modes will come a fuller understanding of how we structure and situate ourselves in the world. In the sense that Goffman's paper is about, the way we present ourselves (and accept ourselves as presented) in a certain kind of picture—an ad—can tell us about some of basic social arrangements. In that sense, the "grammar" of ads may reflect the "grammar" of social arrangements, and the rules governing how women in ads are *shown* in relation to men may tell us how our society structures the concept of Gender.

In recent years this kind of analysis has often been labeled content analysis. When Freud (1910) published his analysis of one of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, he felt that he was merely extending his theories about human behavior to the behavior of great, as well as, ordinary men. He argues that the same psychological principles should hold for all men, and felt compelled to defend himself against the charge that he was demeaning the great by resorting to the kind of psychoanalysis applied only to the "sick." Freud, although he is not often thought of as a social analyst, realized that an analysis of what people believed—whether those beliefs were true or false in a scientific sense—could be used in the analysis of *social* as well as personal behavior. In justifying his use of anecdote in his analysis of da Vinci he wrote, "and even if this story of Vasari's has neither external nor much internal probability but belongs to the legend which began to be woven around the mysterious Master even before his death, *it is still of incontestable value as evidence of what men believed at the time*" (my italics).

Erik Erikson (1950), based on iconographic methods developed for the analysis of paintings and filtered through a Freudian framework that argued that evidence of what men believed could be found in autobiographies of popular heroes as well as films made about the lives of such men, used the Soviet film *Childhood of Gorky* to develop an analysis of Russian psychological character. Erikson's method has subsequently been labeled psychohistory rather than content psychoanalysis and has been employed by an increasing number of researchers in studies relating personal to large scale social behavior and events.

By the time of World War II a small group of social scientists in several countries had realized that an analysis of symbolic productions such as speeches, books, stories, movies, and cartoons produced in a particular society and widely disseminated therein, could be used as evidence of popular belief. Not only could these symbolic events be used as evidence of *what* people believed but they could be used as evidence of what political leaders *wanted* people to believe. Harold Lasswell and a small group of political scientists set about analyzing the speeches of German political leaders. In 1945 Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and a group of their colleagues began work on what became the first large-scale comparative analysis of the symbolic mass media productions of other cultures (Mead and Metraux 1953). They called their work cultural analysis.

Later Nathan Leites and Martha Wolfenstein (1950), who

had worked in the original Culture at a Distance Project, attempted a large-scale comparative analysis of the most popular films of England, France, and the United States. In many ways their work can lead us directly to the kind of study so differently developed by Goffman.

Wolfenstein and Leites argued that "where a group of people share a common culture, they are likely to have certain daydreams in common. We talk, for example, of the American dream . . . and the acquisition of gleaming cars and iceboxes . . ." In that context the authors of the study discuss the new types of heroes and heroines that appear in the mass media and whose images come to life. They argue that their analysis of movies will, for example, allow them to gain insight into such things as a culture's ideas about "the ideal girl." ". . . numerous young men (will) see how the girl who fits their half-formulated wishes looks and talks and how she behaves with her man."

Since the 1940s there have been many analyses of this kind, seeking to find common patterns of heroes, villains, family life, violence, and other examples arising out of "the recurrent daydreams which enter into the consciousness of millions . . ." (Wolfenstein and Leites). Most recently George Gerbner (1972-76) has developed a concept which he describes as an analysis of cultural indicators, in which he analyzes mass media productions ranging from confession magazines and comic books to prime time television, in an attempt to describe and to assign social meaning to those messages that are recurrently being disseminated through the mass media.

While framing Goffman's work within the tradition of Freud and of cultural and content analysis it is necessary—as it is with all frames—to realize that the frame is in Goffman's terms, "a small scale spatial metaphor . . . (a place within which) mythic historic events are played through in a condensed and idealized version." In the tradition of Freud as well as Durkheim, Goffman believes that his analysis of what is frequently overlooked as a trivial social event serves to uncover a great deal of social life that is ordinarily hidden in unformulated courses of activity and experience. Going further, Goffman in this study is arguing that certain kinds of social pictures provide us with glimpses of these condensed and idealized versions of mythic historic events and give the individual "an opportunity to face directly a representation . . . a mock up of what he is supposed to hold dear, a presentation of the supposed ordering of his existence."

This study can be understood as being in several frames at the same time. On one level it can be understood as a study of ceremony, on another as a study of pictures. As a study of ceremony it is about special ceremonies called advertisements which tend to describe how society structures itself. As a study of pictures it is about a special kind of picturing ceremony which Goffman calls "social portraiture" through which a society expresses itself. As Goffman sees it, these social portraits are both the substance and the shadow of social life. While earlier analysts took for granted the distinction between a picture and that which it depicts, Goffman tends to show the connection between the two; to emphasize the complex relationship between everyday ceremonial behaviors and such symbolic representations of these behaviors as pictures.

Another frame through which Goffman's analysis of these

social portraits must be looked at is the frame of the ethologist. Here Goffman presents two seemingly contradictory frames at the same time. He presents the concepts of ceremony and ritual as being primarily *social* arrangements, while at the same time presenting the ethologist's concept of ritual and ritual expression as a form of "species utilitarian display" that serves to regulate social life from a biologically determined base. Here the double frame becomes important since it allows Goffman to distinguish between communication behavior and other forms of social arrangements. He recognizes that patterns of behavior may tell us certain things about society—may inform us as witnesses—without communicating.¹ As he puts it "Displays don't communicate in the narrow sense of the term; they don't enunciate something through a language of symbols openly established and used solely for that purpose." Goffman's bringing together of the view that some symbolic behavior is social with the view that some symbolic or ritual behavior is genetic or biological forces us to examine the intentional or meaningful nature of the social forces that he talks about.

In the section entitled "Picture Frames" Goffman then addresses many of the questions related to the nature of photographs as expressions, evidence, and truth statements about social "reality." Here he lays aside questions of the hidden nature of the material he is dealing with, and is willing to take the difficult position that the camera *both* fakes what is before it and that what is before the camera doesn't allow one to fake. He thus bravely tackles the core issues of camera truth and camera structure. The issue then gets further complicated because he is dealing with concepts about the structure of social reality (or the pattern *he* discerns as social reality) and the very act of structuring reality by symbolic means.

In dealing with the special kind of picture used in advertisements as well as something as basic to social organization as gender, Goffman is forced to face the difference between certain intentionally created symbolic fuses meant to communicate—such as photographs in advertisements—and social behaviors and arrangements that may organize or help to organize social life but are not yet openly established enough to become conventionalized communicative symbols. He recognizes that models may be shown in photographs in a way that is systematically different from the way they might deploy themselves when not before a camera. In explicating this duality—that people can behave so as to appear in pictures in ways that they never behave in "real life"—Goffman develops the term *instantiation*, or *instance record*. He sees clearly that a picture is an instance record of an event before the camera. It can at best prove that such goings on as are shown can be performed. An instance record, he points out, is not necessarily an instance of social practice in "real life." What one can understand, however, is that many such advertisements are a body of instance records of another kind of social practice—a symbolic practice. By showing the nature of pictures and by examining how certain kinds of pictures show or portray the world we learn some of the regularities of the situated social fuses we make about things.

Goffman adds another important concept to our understanding of pictures and the "real world." It is his constant emphasis on the duality of relationship between what a

picture is and what it is of that helps us to see how the way we behave is colored by the way we interpret pictures of the way we behave, and that conversely, the way we make pictures of behavior is colored by the way we interpret behavior. In this connection he introduces the concept of *glimpsing*.

Here, in a tradition that can be traced back to Harry Stack Sullivan in psychiatry, Goffman points out that what we see of people in social situations is only a glimpse of the outside—the public as opposed to the private self—and that from these glimpses of a social person we construct a social reality. The psychological, personal reality most often not only remains hidden, but often is not needed for our understanding of the social behavior in question. His example of the young couple in a jewelry store presenting a "picture" of young marrieds, or about-to-be marrieds, shopping for a ring while in fact whiling away some time before going to the Fellini movie down the block, raises the all important issue of the "truth" of social reality. For Goffman is implying that the way we behave when we can be glimpsed depends in large part on the way we want our social selves to be understood: that we all know how certain behaviors will be interpreted and that we all both act and interpret in that way. Goffman's position is subtle and complex. He is telling us that advertisers pose their models so that when we see their ads we interpret them as we would glimpses of social behavior. That these pictures capitalize on conventionalized portraiture rules for "maleness," "strength," "wife," "sexy," "rich," and so on. At the same time, he implies, we must understand that advertisers and other people engaged in acts of communication can do so only within the frameworks of social behavior. That in fact social behavior itself is the act of posing for the glimpses of observers.

There is no doubt of the cogency of Goffman's reflections about the nature of social behavior and of a picture's articulation of specific glimpses of that behavior for communicative purposes by a picture maker. The question that Goffman then must face is the nature of his own analysis of these pictures. As laymen, as ordinary social creatures, we must be satisfied with the socially situated glimpse. But what about the analyst? Is he glimpsing—taking a quick look at these pictures and making some off-the-cuff comments on the society they portray in terms of the same set of social conventions under which the pictures were also produced—or is he doing something different; something deeper, and more "scientific?" Goffman's analysis implies the question. Future studies may be able to supply some answers.

In the third section of this study Goffman tackles the problems facing the social analyst in the analysis of pictures. He faces questions of sample and sample size, the ability to generalize from certain groups of data, questions of "truth" and "realism" in pictures, and some of the central methodological problems in the social sciences; the problems of discovery, presentation, and proof. He argues that working with photographs allows one to exploit the very special advantages they have in the process of discovery and presentation of material about social behavior.

This section, in which the pictures he has assembled are embedded, contains one of the few instances that I have seen of an open presentation of the pros and cons of an analytic

method. He discusses how he believes pictures can and can't be used in social analysis. He outlines a series of arguments showing why the method he uses is valuable, as well as a series of arguments detailing why one shouldn't pay much attention to it. He sums up much of the argument current today in social science revolving around the study of a certain kind of photography used as a datum of social analysis. Much of his argument is, in my opinion, valid for most other kinds of communicational symbolic events. The analysis of films, television, novels, plays, comic books, and a wide variety of mass produced material can also be analyzed as social portraiture and will, I feel sure, benefit greatly from this fully documented section dealing with Goffman's own methodology.

It is finally necessary to clarify two other frames which are important to Goffman as well as to most analysts of society. One frame is bounded by what we may define as "out there," a natural world in which we assume our social space and activities exist and take place. Another frame is bounded by our own articulations of that space and behavior; by what we say, picture, write and otherwise symbolize in the complex modes, media, and codes in which we have learned to structure our universe. It is important to understand that these two frames are not mutually contradictory or exclusive, and that pictures can be employed for analysis using both frames. In some cases the problem is to produce pictures which can be used as evidence of certain events, as instance-events, as evidence that Mr. X was in a certain place doing certain things, or as a record of the way we observed certain behaviors with a camera. In other cases the problem is to examine pictures that have already been produced for a variety of purposes: by politicians running for office, by advertisers trying to sell beauty creams, by "artists" giving us examples of their structures of the world. Both, in a way, are in Goffman's sense of the term, social portraits. The differences, I believe, are differences of scale, of level, of analytic activity attempted. It would be missing much of the point of Goffman's analysis of how pictures can be used in social analysis to take this study as an argument for one picture frame opposed to another.

The point, I think, is not what kind of pictures one makes, or what kind of pictures one analyses. The point must

be the kind of analysis one makes. I believe it would be most fruitful to consider this study as an example of an important kind of situated social fuss one good analyst can generate from a specific group of pictures.

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NOTES

¹ For a fuller explanation of a concept of communication which makes explicit the distinctions between communication and interaction, between informing and attributing and implying and inferring, see Worth and Gross (1974).

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